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Composer and pianist Martin Amlin has received numerous awards and grants for his varied compositions. He has written works for solo piano, piano duet, organ, chamber music, orchestra, solo instrument, voice, and chorus. With such a litany of works, Amlin is still considered a relative newcomer to the world of classical music composers.

Amlin's keyboard compositional style can be characterized through the use of major and minor sevenths, multifaceted time signatures, vibrant harmonic structures, creative uses of traditional musical forms, such as variation and sonata form, serial technique, rhythmic complexities, and the use of extreme range. Even though his output of keyboard literature is not expansive, a cohesive keyboard compositional style has emerged. It is the purpose of this document to examine, through a brief analysis, the compositional style of Martin Amlin as manifested through his keyboard works to enhance an informed performance. Consequently it is also the aspiration of this document to spark greater interest in his keyboard works and inspire others to explore further what Amlin has to offer to the pianist and the listener.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF MARTIN AMLIN'S KEYBOARD WORKS:  
A PERSONAL CASE STUDY IN INFORMING PERFORMANCE

by

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in Partial Fulfillment  
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Approved by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Martin Amlin is an American master in the realm of musical composition for the keyboard. Among the traits that help to place him in a distinguished category are his emphasis of the major seventh and minor seventh chordal structures, his varied rhythmic structures, and his creative uses of traditional musical forms, such as variation and sonata form. A further trait of foremost importance is his attention to the musical quality that touches the heart of the listener. His music is more than an exercise in contemporary compositional techniques; rather he uses these techniques to emphasize the deeper sense of musical expression.

While most of Amlin's keyboard music is structured around some sort of seventh, whether major, minor, or a combination, the genius in his writing comes from the fact that the seventh harmonies create a very interesting listening palette. Amlin is quite sensitive to the way sounds are perceived even within expansive textures that cover the full range of the keyboard. Rhythmic emphasis is used to enhance the interest of a melodic line and the coloristic impact of seventh harmonies and other processes. Amlin's keyboard music commands the attention of the ear and engenders curiosity to know what will happen next. For the performer, understanding the various compositional techniques associated with each work generates the capability for an enhanced artistic presentation,



one which creates a sense that the placement of every note is exactly as it must be and leaves the listener with a sense of fulfillment at the conclusion of any given piece.

This document will examine, through brief analysis, Martin Amlin's compositional style as manifested through his keyboard works. In chapter two, we will look at his harmonic tendencies, chapter three pertains to his rhythmic processes, and chapter four covers uses of serial techniques. Even though his output of keyboard literature is not expansive, it forms an excellent representation of his compositional style.

Martin Amlin, a composer and pianist who has received numerous awards and grants for his many and varied compositions, studied with famed French pianist and pedagogue Nadia Boulanger at the Ecoles d'Art Américaines in Fontainebleau and the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, and he holds graduate degrees from the Eastman School of Music. He is currently the Chairman of the Department of Theory and Composition at Boston University.<sup>1</sup>

His compositional output consists of works for chorus, solo voice, solo instruments, chamber ensembles, organ, piano, and two pianos. A complete list of solo piano works is found in Appendix A. The works that will be discussed in this document are *Sonata No. 6*, *Five Preludes for Piano*, *Sonata No. 7*, *Eight Variations*, *Three Alphabetudes*, and *Seven Etudes on Intervals*.

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<sup>1</sup> Amlin, Martin. *Martin Amlin Composer and Pianist*, 2009 [on-line] available from <http://www.martinamlin.com/info.asp?pgs=biography>; Internet, accessed 6 March 2009.

*Sonata No. 6* was composed at Tanglewood and Boston in 1987, *Five Preludes for Piano* are each dedicated or in memory of five individuals. “Variations,” the first of the five, is for Margaret Aquino, the second, “Elegy,” is in memoriam of Jan Elizabeth Benson (1955-1989), “Aria” is in memoriam of L.B. (Leonard Bernstein), “A Birthday Greeting” is for Frank Glazer, and “South End Rag” is for Virginia Eskin. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Focus on Piano Literature 2000 commissioned *Sonata No. 7*, for Andrew Willis. It is structured in the traditional fast-slow-fast scheme with movements titled “Fantasia,” “Lament,” and “Scherzo and Fugue.” Serialism is used in the outer movements of *Sonata No. 7*.

*Eight Variations* was originally written on a commission from Marianne Uszler, editor of *Piano and Keyboard* magazine. It was intended for publication in that periodical, which unfortunately ceased production before the piece could appear. The work was written with the intermediate pianist in mind, but is actually more appropriate for the advanced student and is a challenging work for pianists of any level.

As the work unfolds, the listener is transported through various evocations of the styles of Georges Bizet (“L’amour est un oiseau rebelle” [Habanera] from *Carmen*), J. S. Bach (*Two-part Invention #8*), and L. Beethoven (“Arietta” from *Piano Sonata Op. 111*), as well as less specific references to well-known genres. The order of the *Eight Variations* is “Chorale,” “Waltz,” “Habanera,” “Two-part Invention,” “Arietta,” “Tarantella,” “Music-box,” and “Barcarolle and Chorale *al rovescio*.”

*Three Alphabetudes* are based on the same premise as the *Five Preludes for Piano* in which each is dedicated or in memory of a particular individual. The first is “Etude: on

the name Stefan Kozinski,” the second is “Piece for N.A.N.,” and the third is “Meditation on J...D...”. The final piece for consideration is *Etudes on Seven Intervals*. This is the most recent work, containing etudes focused on intervals of the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and tenth. Each of the works mentioned will be covered in the course of this document.

## CHAPTER II

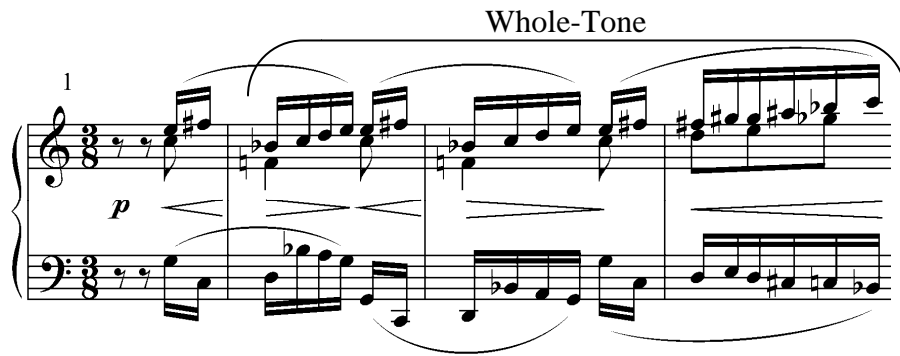
### HARMONIC TENDENCIES

At first glance the harmonic tendencies of Amlin's keyboard music tend to resemble the non-traditional, random harmonic structures used by many contemporary composers. But the true foundation lies in the major and minor seventh chords that permeate every aspect of his keyboard works. This is not happenstance, but well thought-out execution in the construction of each piece. Aside from the fact that such seventh chords fit nicely under the hand of the pianist, they afford manifold possibilities for the construction of sounds that have profound effects on the listener.

Even though the major/minor sevenths are pervasive in Amlin's keyboard compositions, he has not limited himself to those harmonies alone. Dominant sevenths, whole-tone and octatonic properties, serial techniques, and the use of major and minor seconds all contribute to the coloristic style of Amlin's keyboard compositions. Even though serial techniques generally are not considered a harmonic tendency, Amlin's application of serialism consistently utilizes the structures of major/minor sevenths.

"Variations," from *Five Preludes for Piano*, uses whole-tone properties quite extensively as the harmonic coloristic style. This can be seen immediately at the beginning of the piece in the right hand and continues throughout. Example 1 shows the first four measures.

**Example 1: Amlin, “Variations” from *Preludes for Piano*, mm. 1-4**



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Another use of whole-tone properties can be found in “Lament,” the second movement of *Sonata No. 7*, through the use of whole-tone tetrachords juxtaposed at the interval of a minor second which can be found in measure 34-36, as shown in example 2. Example 3 further demonstrates his use of whole-tone principles through the gesture of falling seconds, which is in keeping with the designation “Lament.”

**Example 2: Amlin, “Lament” from *Sonata 7*, mm. 34-36**

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 34 to 36, and the second system covers measures 35 to 36. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The music is marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The score includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, dynamics, and articulation marks. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, dynamics, and articulation marks. The score is divided into two systems, with measures 34-36 in the first system and measures 35-36 in the second system. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, dynamics, and articulation marks.

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50

*molto dim.*

*accel.*

Whole-Tone

3

3

51

*pp* *sempre*

The “Chorale” from *Eight Variations*, shown in example 4, stands as a good example of the prevalence of major and minor seventh chord sonorities in Amlin’s music. With the exception of two measures of minor seventh triads, the “Chorale” is built entirely from major seventh chords. A closer look at the construction of the major and minor seventh chords reveals a relationship of perfect fifths, between the root and fifth and the third and seventh, which is the basis of these chordal sonorities. What also makes this example interesting is the way in which Amlin has voiced the chords with a combination of open and closed textures. He begins with an open texture, where the harmonies are spread within a two-octave range between the two hands, utilizing perfect fourths and perfect fifths thus enhancing this open texture. For the next few measures the texture changes to a more closed, or closer, chordal structure again making use of the

perfect fourth and perfect fifth intervallic relationships. The final two measures once again progress back to an open texture to complete the “Chorale.”

**Example 4: Amlin, “Chorale” from *Eight Variations*, mm. 1-9**

The musical score for Example 4 is presented in two systems. The first system, measures 1-4, is divided into two sections: 'Open texture' (measures 1-2) and 'Closed texture' (measures 3-4). The second system, measures 5-8, continues the 'Closed texture'. The score is in 2/2 time and features complex chordal structures with many accidentals. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) at measure 1, *p* (piano) at measure 3, *mf* (mezzo-forte) at measure 5, *f* (forte) at measure 6, and *p* (piano) at measure 8. The notation includes various intervals and chordal sonorities, with some measures featuring multiple accidentals.

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The *Eight Variations* do not begin with the traditional “theme,” thus raising the question “What is the basis for the *Eight Variations*?” Consideration of the harmonic foundation is essential to solve the conundrum of variations without a representative theme. Table 1 shows the harmonic progression for the nine-measure “Chorale” utilizing these chordal sonorities.



**Table 1: Amlin, “Chorale” from *Eight Variations*, Harmonic Progression**

Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4	Measure 5
DbM7	GbM7	AM7 DM7	DM7 GbM7	Dm7 G#m7 Bm7
Measure 6	Measure 7	Measure 8	Measure 9	
AbM7 CM7	Fm7 Bm7 Dm7	DM7 AM7 GbM7	DbM7	

Each variation of *Eight Variations* centers on its own tonal center as it unfolds. Looking at the overall construction of the set of variations, the tonal centers of the first four variations follow the chord progression of the first four measures of variation one. A closer examination of measures 1-3 reveals the construction of a major seventh chord based on “D” utilizing enharmonic spellings. Amlin, making this opening progression inherent to the larger construction of the *Eight Variations*, carefully plans this, which helps to answer the question of why there are eight variations with no apparent theme. Each variation also adopts a generic compositional procedure, such as Two-Part Invention, with the harmonic progression as its basis. Martin Amlin has made this opening chordal progression the organic basis for the *Eight Variations*.

One finds in this progression a preponderance of major sevenths with two measures of minor sevenths. Interestingly, measures 8 & 9 replicate measures 1-3 in reverse order. This is a key structural component of *Eight Variations*; each variation uses this formula of duplicating the opening measures at the end, but in reverse. Example 5, “Habanera,” demonstrates this technique. The harmonic progression of mm. 34-36 is AM7, DM7, AM7, FM7, and Bb7 while that of mm. 45-50 is the reverse, Bb7, FM7, DM7, and AM7.

**Example 5: Amlin, “Habanera” from *Eight Variations*, mm. 33-50**

33

AM7 DM7 AM7 FM7 Bb7

39

45

Bb7 FM7 DM7 AM7

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Variation eight, the “Barcarolle and Chorale *al rovescio*,” follows a slightly different pattern due to the fact of linking the chorale to the barcarolle. The harmonic progressions of the opening three measures, mm. 139-141, fluctuate between two chords in each measure. Example 6 shows the measures in question with the harmonic analysis.

**Example 6: Amlin, “Barcarolle and Chorale *al rovescio*” from *Eight Variations*, mm. 139-153**

Chord symbols for measures 139-141: DbM7 GbM7 DbM7 GbM7

Chord symbols for measures 142-145: AM7 DM7 AM7 DM7

Chord symbols for measures 151-153: DM7 AM7 DM7 AM7

Chord symbols for measures 154-157: DM7 AM7 DM7 AM7 F#M7

Dynamics: *mf*, *f*, *mp*, *cresc. molto*, *ff*, *p*, *pp*, *sub*

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Just as the harmonic progressions of the previous variations were repeated in reverse at the end so, too, this fluctuation between two chords is also repeated toward the end of the “Barcarolle,” though not as precisely, as shown in example 6. Looking at measure 141, and starting with the upbeat from the previous measure, we see that the harmonic progression is AM7, DM7, AM7, and DM7. Comparing this to measure 151, we notice that the progression is again in reverse, DM7, AM7, DM7, AM7, and is once again repeated in measure 153, beginning with the upbeat from measure 152, with the addition of an F#M7 leading to the repeat of the “Chorale *al rovescio*,” that is, the opening “Chorale” (Variation one) stated in reverse, a very interesting technique to round out the total work as a whole. Following, examples 7 and 8, is a comparison of the two chorales, Variation 1 and Variation 8 *al rovescio*.

**Example 7: Amlin, “Chorale” from *Eight Variations*, mm. 1-9**

The musical score for Example 7 is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 5, and the second system contains measures 6 through 9. The music is written for piano in 2/2 time. The key signature consists of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first system begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic. The second system begins with a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic, reaches a *f* (forte) dynamic in measure 7, and concludes with a *p* (piano) dynamic in measure 9. The notation includes various chords and single notes, with some measures featuring slurs and dynamic markings.

**Example 8: Amlin, “Chorale *al rovescio*” from *Eight Variations*, mm. 154-163**

154

*p*

cresc.

159

*f*

dim.

*p*

*pp*

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*General Implications for Performance*

After discovering Amlin’s harmonic tendencies, it became clearer how to approach his music, in this case the *Eight Variations*. At first glance it was somewhat confusing how the work flowed together, since it was made up of eight idiomatic miniatures, but after finding the chordal progression illustrated in table 1, it was apparent that the work was cleverly constructed.

Because the opening chordal progression forms the basis for each variation, it necessary to trace this harmonic progression within the idiomatic writing of each variation. The coloristic effects of this harmonic progression and the idiomatic writing of each variation enhanced the opportunity for creative musical expression. The cleverness

of the “Chorale *al rovescio*” clinched the effectiveness of the *Eight Variations* as a whole. Thus an understanding of Amlin’s harmonic tendencies led to a more informed performance that was easier to comprehend and enjoy.

### CHAPTER III

#### RHYTHMIC PROCESS

##### *Sonata No. 6*

The keyboard music of Martin Amlin is filled with complex rhythmic changes, multiple time signatures, and a plethora of notes that frequently move in non-stop motion. Amlin himself has aptly described much of his music as perpetual motion. *Sonata No. 6* typifies this procedure.

Much of his rhythmic process involves groupings of complex rhythms such as 3:4, 5:4, and the like, that create a sense of flow without strict adherence to the beat. *Sonata No. 6*, an unmeasured work, uses many complex rhythmic groups. According to Amlin, this sonata metamorphosed between measured and unmeasured states several times, finally settling upon unmeasured. In the measured state, with its abundance of changing time signatures, the need for the performer to keep track of the time signature tends to distract from the underlying musical concept; whereas in the unmeasured state, the rhythmic structure of downbeats and time signatures is removed, creating a freer sense of continuous flow. A comparison of the opening in the measured and unmeasured states is shown in examples 9 and 10.

**Example 9: Amlin, Sonata No. 6, mm. 7-11**

Example 9 is a musical score for Amlin's Sonata No. 6, measures 7-11. It is written for piano in 4/4 time. The score consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 7-11, and the second system covers measures 10-14. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings like 'cresc.', 'f', 'ff', and 'cresc. sempre'.

**Example 10: Amlin, Sonata No. 6, unmeasured**

Example 10 is a musical score for Amlin's Sonata No. 6, unmeasured. It is written for piano in 4/4 time. The score consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 7-11, and the second system covers measures 10-14. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings like 'cresc.', 'f', 'ff', and 'cresc. sempre'.

Examples 9 and 10, © 1987 by Theodore Presser Company, printed with permission



In the unmeasured version, one immediately senses a freedom not found in the measured version, which emphasizes a strict adherence to the downbeat and a strong presence of the notated time signature. Page 4 of the measured version shows numerous changes of time signature, as seen in example 11, while example 12 shows page 4 of the same piece except in the unmeasured state.

**Example 11: Amlin, *Sonata No. 6*, p. 4 measured**

The musical score for Example 11 is presented in three systems. The first system is in bass clef and begins with a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with slurs and a bass line with eighth notes. The marking *dim. poco a poco* is placed above the first measure, and *sempre dim.* is placed above the second measure. The time signature changes to 12/16 in the second measure and to 2/4 in the third measure. The second system is in bass clef with a 7/8 time signature, marked *pp*. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with slurs. The third system is in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature, featuring a complex rhythmic pattern with slurs.

**Example 12: Amlin, *Sonata 6*, p. 4 unmeasured**

*dim. poco a poco*

*sempre dim.*

*pp*

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This sonata is also a fine example of perpetual motion. Throughout the work, the sixteenth note is the standard unit of motion as can be seen in Example 12, above. All through the work there appear many pages of non-stop sixteenth notes in various groupings, with limited, if any, presence of other note values. Yet, far from seeming mechanical, this sonata provides an engrossing and unpredictable experience for both the performer and listener.

Preludes for Piano: “Variations”

“Variations,” from *Preludes for Piano*, also relies upon perpetual motion. It begins with sixteenths and moves through several cycles in which the underlying note value accelerates to triplet sixteenths and thirty-seconds. Example 13 exhibits the various cycles used in this work.

**Example 13: Amlin, “Variations” from *Preludes for Piano*, mm. 1-2, 37-38, and 72-73**

The image displays three excerpts of musical notation for the piece "Variations" from *Preludes for Piano*. Each excerpt is in 3/8 time and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The first excerpt (measures 1-2) shows a right-hand melody of eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment of sixteenth notes. The second excerpt (measures 37-38) features a right-hand melody of eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment of triplet sixteenth notes. The third excerpt (measures 72-73) shows a right-hand melody of eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment of thirty-second notes. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, time signatures, dynamic markings, and articulation marks.

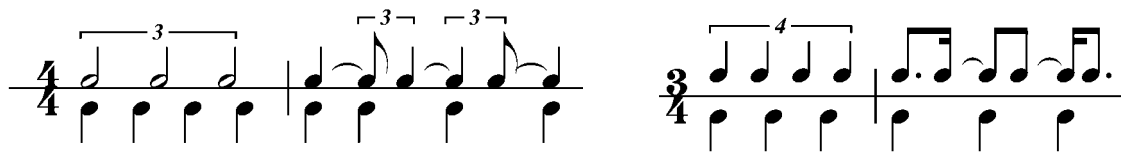
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Three Alphabetudes

Rhythmic complexities are evident in the majority of Amlin’s keyboard works, and one such rhythm, 3:4, is frequently favored in his music. Example 14 demonstrates

various possible executions of this 3:4 rhythm, which is used extensively in the first half of the Alphabetude “Etude: on the name Stefan Kozinski” (example 15).

**Example 14: Various 3:4 rhythms**



**Example 15: Amlin, “Etude: on the name Stefan Kozinski” from *Three Alphabetudes*, mm. 4-8**



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Another aspect of Amlin’s rhythmic process is the use of irregular patterns.

Example 16 shows such a rhythmic pattern from the B section of “Etude: on the name Stefan Kozinski” that has a highly syncopated flair.

**Example 16: Amlin, “Etude: on the name Stefan Kozinski” from *Three Alphabetudes*, mm. 60-67**

The musical score for Example 16, measures 60-67, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 60-62) shows a right hand with a complex, fast-moving melody, marked 'f with energy'. The left hand is mostly silent. The second system (measures 63-67) shows the right hand continuing with a similar texture, while the left hand introduces a new rhythmic motive, which is repeated a tenth lower in the subsequent measures.

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Adding to the complexity of example 16, Amlin inserts yet another irregular rhythmic motive, mm. 63-65, on top of the motive introduced at m. 60. Thus the addition of this motive compounds a highly complex rhythmic texture. Measures 66-67 demonstrate this motive repeated a tenth lower, which hints at properties of a fugal texture. This pattern continues for several measures until Amlin introduces another pattern of continuous sixteenth notes.

*Seven Etudes on Intervals: “Tenths”*

This set of etudes is the most recent of Amlin’s publications for piano, containing studies built on seconds, thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths, sevenths, and tenths. In each etude

the execution of the rhythmic complexities is highly technically challenging, and significant interpretive demands are placed upon the performer as well.

“Tenths” does not completely follow suit with the other six etudes, which all have complex time signatures, since it carries no time signature at all. Like *Sonata No. 6*, “Tenths” also lacks bar lines, generating a sense of seamlessness as the piece unfolds, while a pervasive rhythmic ostinato underscores this sense of freedom in a slow, static tempo.

Execution of this piece must be approached with great care. The sparse texture of the opening is deceptive in that the moderate tempo marking ( $\text{♩} = 60$ ) lures one into thinking that this etude will be relatively easy to play. As the texture thickens, however, it becomes apparent that a very large hand is needed to execute the massive chordal structures, and it is only the moderate tempo that allows the player to handle the challenges of execution. Due to the constant stretches of a tenth, this piece does not accommodate those with small hands.

#### *Seven Etudes on Intervals: “Thirds”*

“Thirds” brilliantly blends seventh-chord harmonies, melodic gymnastics, and rhythmic and technical challenges in a stunning portrayal of virtuosity. The piece is in ABA Coda form with the B theme reappearing at the end of the reprise of the A section, rhythmically augmented under a series of descending chromatic thirds. Example 17 shows the B theme in its original state, highlighted with brackets, and example 18 shows

how the augmented version, executed in the left-hand and again highlighted with brackets, dovetails with the descending chromatic thirds at the end of the A section.

**Example 17: Amlin, “Thirds” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, mm. 35-49**

35

*p*

*p*

40

*p* *sempre*

45

*mp* *cresc.* *f*

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**Example 18: Amlin, “Thirds” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, mm. 75-83**

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 75-77) features a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 3/8 time signature. The right hand plays a series of chords, each containing a third interval, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic and the instruction *sempre*. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment of chords. The second system (measures 78-81) continues the right-hand pattern, with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic marking appearing in measure 80. The left hand accompaniment becomes more complex, featuring sixteenth-note patterns. The third system (measures 82-83) shows the right hand continuing its chordal sequence, while the left hand features a more active, rhythmic accompaniment.

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Rhythmically, this piece challenges the pianist, not only from the standpoint of executing the thirds, but through the varied time signatures and groupings. The electrifying tempo marking of ( $\text{♩} = 144$ ) adds to the demands of this piece, which requires great gymnastic agility across the range of the keyboard. The B section provides respite



from the excitement of the A section. Here Amlin places a calming ostinato pedal on the offbeat against the theme, as shown in example 17.

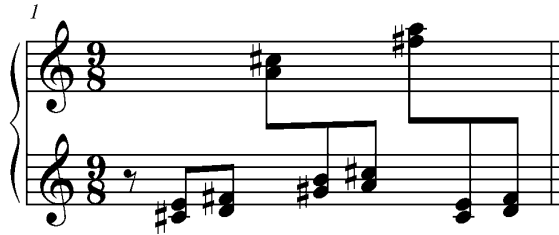
In its return, the A section undergoes a brief modification casting the right hand in sixths. Great intensity is achieved through dramatic caesuras, the dovetailing of the two themes of the work, and an abrupt halt just before the coda. The coda, shown in Example 19, is derived from the opening motive of the work and is to be played more broadly, allowing the sonorities of the last two measures to reverberate freely. Example 20 shows the first measure of the work for purposes of comparison.

**Example 19: Amlin, “Thirds” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, mm. 84-86**

The musical score for Example 19, Amlin's "Thirds" from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, measures 84-86, is presented in two systems. The first system, measures 84-85, shows the right hand (treble clef) playing a melodic line with a "luminous" quality, marked *fff* (fortissimo). The left hand (bass clef) provides a steady ostinato pedal. The second system, measures 86-87, shows the right hand continuing the melodic line, marked *8va* (octave up), and the left hand continuing the ostinato pedal. The piece concludes with a coda marked "L.V." (Larghetto Vivace).

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**Example 20: Amlin, “Thirds” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, m. 1**



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*Seven Etudes on Intervals: “Fifths”*

Since the structure of the major seventh chord, Amlin’s ‘signature’ harmony, can be viewed as two interlocking perfect fifths, the “Etude on Fifths” is particularly congenial to his style. Like the other etudes, this work is very challenging in all respects, filled with the aspects that represent Amlin as a composer: seventh-chord harmonic construction, intricate rhythmic challenges, repeated patterns of harmony and rhythm, and the suspenseful pause before the climactic end of the piece.

The opening gesture of the first measure is similar to the openings of several other Amlin works, several of which are compared in the examples below (Examples 21-24). Each example opens with an upward gesture, which appears to be a unifying and identifying factor among Amlin’s keyboard works.

**Example 21: Amlin, “Fifths” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, m. 1**



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**Example 22: Amlin, *Sonata No. 6*, Opening Gesture**



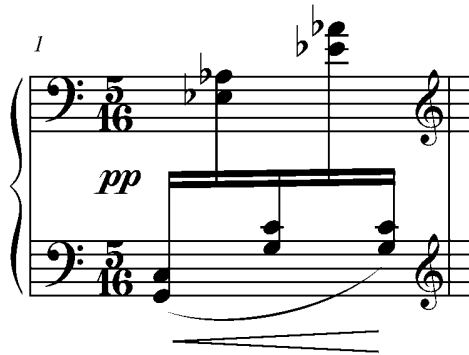
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**Example 23: Amlin, “Fantasia” from *Sonata No. 7*, m. 1**



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**Example 24: Amlin, “Fourths” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, m. 1**



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The etude on “Fifths” presents complex rhythmic challenges that are crucial to the interpretation and require great concentration. It also explores extremely quick changes in register and dynamics. Example 25 shows a portion of these challenges.

**Example 25: Amlin, “Fifths” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, mm. 11-19**

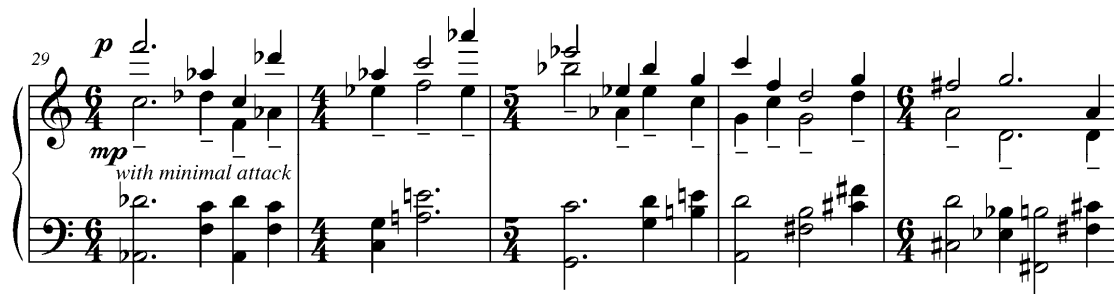
The musical score for Example 25, Amlin's "Fifths" from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, measures 11-19, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 11-13) begins with a piano (p) dynamic and a "motionless" instruction. The second system (measures 14-17) features a fortissimo (fff) dynamic with a crescendo. The third system (measures 18-19) includes a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic, a decrescendo, and a "sec" (second ending) marking. The score is written for piano and includes various dynamic markings and articulation marks.

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The much slower B section of this piece contains expansive intervals of elevenths in both hands. Rendering these intervals is difficult even for pianists with larger hands and poses an extreme challenge for pianists with smaller hands. Example 26 shows just a portion of this section. The composer's preference regarding this particular passage and possible ways of executing it with smaller hands is that the construction of the chords *not* be rearranged though octave displacement to make it possible to play all the notes

simultaneously, but rather that the given notes be carefully broken without altering the hushed effect of the section.<sup>2</sup> The tenuto markings found in this example were explained by the composer as an indication to highlight the middle note more than the others.

**Example 26: Amlin, “Fifths” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, mm. 29-33**



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Following the B section, Amlin introduces intensive rhythmic and harmonic structures that create a sense of excitement to the conclusion of the piece. Example 27 demonstrates an alternating repeated pattern, in groups of three's and four's, between the right and the left hands that require the left hand to be on top of the right hand creating very close quarters for proper execution. Amlin directs the performer to approach this passage with great intensity through the instructions *attacca*, *subito fff*, and continual accents of every sixteenth note. However, the right hand should be executed with a bit more emphasis to give the listener something to grasp. As this section unfolds, the descent from the upper register to the lower register of the keyboard continues to

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<sup>2</sup> Amlin, Martin, composer and pianist. Interview by author, 14 February 2009, Boston. Phone interview.

complicate the execution, requiring quick shifts of the hands and the negotiation of embedded repeated notes in a very quick tempo.

**Example 27: Amlin, “Fifths” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, mm. 54-82**

The musical score for Example 27, Amlin's "Fifths" from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, measures 54-82, is presented in 3/8 time. The piece is characterized by its rapid tempo and intricate rhythmic patterns. The score is divided into five systems, each containing two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Notable features include:
 

- Measure 54:** Starts with an *attacca* marking. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a similar triplet. The dynamic is *ff*.
- Measure 59:** Marked *subito*, indicating a change in dynamics or articulation. The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. The dynamic is *ff*.
- Measure 64:** The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. The dynamic is *ff*.
- Measure 69:** The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. The dynamic is *ff*.
- Measure 74:** The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. The dynamic is *mf*.
- Measure 82:** The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. The dynamic is *dim.*

 The score also includes articulation markings such as *attacca* and *simile*, and various dynamic markings including *ff*, *mf*, and *dim.*

Example 28 demonstrates a repeated minor-seventh chord harmonic pattern (mm. 83-88) that is the basis for the harmonic pattern of mm. 148-162 (example 29).

**Example 28: Amlin, “Fifths” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, mm. 83-88**

83

*ff* *sempre*

Ebm7 Fm Bbm7 F#m7 C#m7

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**Example 29: Amlin, “Fifths” from *Seven Etudes on Intervals*, mm. 148-162**

148 *mp* *cresc.* *sempre*  
Ebm7 Fm7 Bbm7 F#m7 C#m7

153 *f*  
Ebm7 Fm7 Bbm7 F#m7 C#m7

158 *fff*  
Ebm7 Fm7 Bbm7 Gbm7 (F#m7) Dbm7 (C#m7)

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Its eventful form, extreme dynamic and register ranges, rhythmic complexities, and exhilarating tempi make the etude on “Fifths” a very fulfilling and enjoyable work to play.

### *Sonata No. 7*

The second movement, “Lament,” lives up to its performance indications of “mysterious” and “eccentric.” In tonality and rhythmic gesture, the opening is reminiscent of Debussy’s prelude “Des pas sur la neige,” with which it shares a hushed mood and sense of spacious timing. Eccentricity is conveyed through avoidance of strong downbeats and continual meter shifts, as shown in example 30.

**Example 30: Amlin, “Lament” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 1-11**

The musical score for Example 30, Amlin's "Lament" from Sonata No. 7, measures 1-11, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) shows a piano (pp) dynamic. The second system (measures 5-8) also includes a piano (pp) dynamic. The third system (measures 9-11) includes a piano (p) dynamic and the word "più". The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sextuplets, and is written in 3/4 time.

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*General Implications for Performance*

The rhythmic process of Amlin's music plays a major role in the interpretive process of a good performance. Gaining the knowledge of the various rhythmic techniques used by Amlin was useful in developing a sense of free flow for each work even with the many diverse time signatures. His various uses of 3:4, and the like, were

hurdles to overcome before any sense of interpretation could take hold, but once these concepts were secure, interpretation became easier and made more sense.

Progressing through the diverse keyboard compositions, it was empowering to notice that certain rhythmic patterns appeared to be constants, generating confidence in one's perception of Amlin's essential traits as a pianist and composer. The rhythmic process began to flow from the innate rhythm of the performer, allowing musical thoughts to merge with the rhythmic flow of the work.

"Etude: On the Name Setfan Kozinski," from *Three Alphabetudes*, is an excellent representative of Amlin's complex rhythmic process. Again, there were many rhythmic challenges to overcome before any interpretive process could begin. A high level of concentration was needed to execute the demands of the work properly. However, once familiar with the various rhythms, a sense of flow began to emerge that created a highly enjoyable experience. By fully experiencing Amlin's syncopated rhythms the performer can clarify the complex rhythmic texture for the listener. The use of rhythmic pauses before the climactic conclusion of the work, allowed a brief respite from the perpetual rhythmic motion, refocusing the attention for the conclusion of the work. Through this higher level of concentration on the rhythmic tendencies in Amlin's keyboard works, a greater sense of freedom in musical expression emerged.

## CHAPTER IV

### SERIAL TECHNIQUES

#### Row Techniques in *Sonata No. 7*

Serial techniques were developed by the composer Arnold Schoenberg in the 1920s to provide an organizing principle for atonal composition. Since that time this technique has been adopted by many composers in a multitude of ways. Martin Amlin is no stranger to this technique and has used it in his *Sonata No. 7* (1999). While this work is by no means strictly serial, it applies serial procedures on several levels.

The first movement, “Fantasia,” presents a tone row within the first two measures, one of three distinct rows that underlie the construction of this composition. The table below (table 2) shows the order of the three rows, which Amlin has identified as favorites. A complete 12-tone matrix of each row can be found in Appendix B. The three rows come to complete fruition in the “Scherzo and Fugue.”

**Table 2: Amlin’s Three Tone Rows**

Order of Row 1											
C	F	Ab	Db	Bb	Eb	E	A	F#	B	D	G
Order of Row 2											
C	G	Bb	Eb	F	Ab	Db	B	C#	F#	A	E
Order of Row 3											
C	G	Ab	Eb	Bb	B	F	E	A	D	C#	F#

After the initial statement of Row 1, shown in example 31, the next statement is Row 3 in P-11 at measure 20-21, as shown in example 32. The upbeat to measure 34 offers a restatement of the opening motive, thus restating Row 1 in its original prime version. From this point forward the appearance of other rows is absent. The majority of this movement consists of major seventh and minor seventh harmonies. In a few instances, overlapping major and minor sevenths can be found as shown in the bass clef of measure 48, example 33.

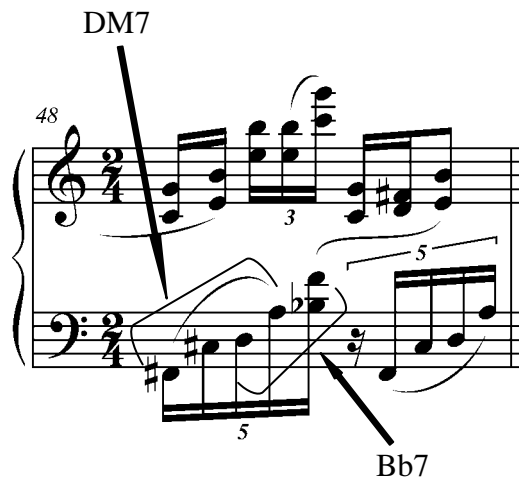
**Example 31: Amlin, “Fantasia” from *Sonata No. 7*, Initial Statement of Row, mm. 1-2**

Row 1: P-1

**Example 32: Amlin, “Fantasia” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 20-21**

Row 3: P-11

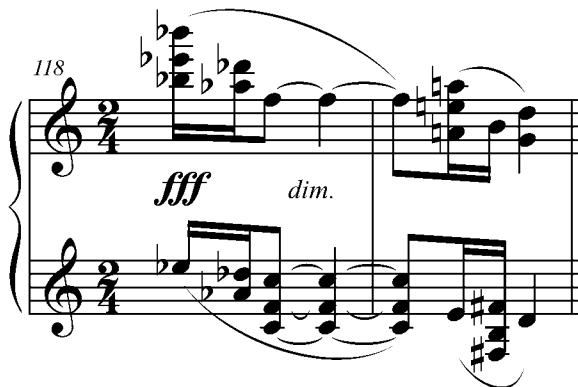
**Example 33: Amlin, “Fantasia” from *Sonata No. 7*, m. 48**



Examples 31, 32, and 33 © 2000 by Theodore Presser Company, printed with permission

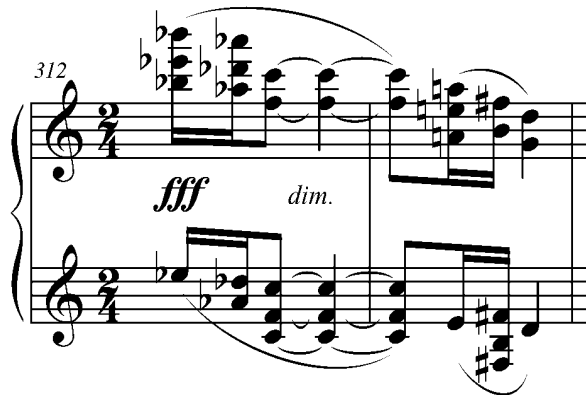
Amlin unifies this movement by restating the opening motive at mm. 118-119 (example 34) and he unifies the sonata as a whole by restating it again in the coda of the “Scherzo” (example 35). Shortly thereafter he also restates the opening motive of the “Lament” (example 36).

**Example 34: Amlin, “Fantasia” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 118-119**

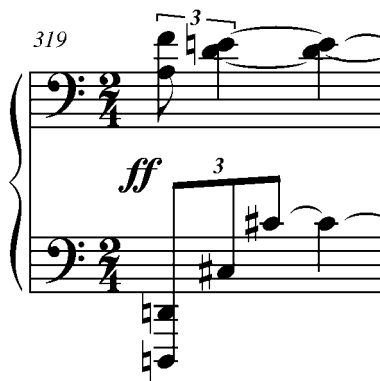


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**Example 35: Amlin, “Scherzo and Fugue” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 312-313**



**Example 36: Amlin, “Scherzo and Fugue” from *Sonata No. 7*, m. 319**



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Another aspect of the unifying process occurs in m. 75 of the “Lament” which foreshadows a principal motive of the “Scherzo” (examples 37 and 38). Within three measures a total of five statements of this motive occur before the end of the movement.



**Example 37: Amlin, “Lament” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 74-75**

**Example 38: Amlin, “Scherzo” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 8 & 28**

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A four-measure introduction announces the “Scherzo and Fugue” after which a strong downbeat emphasis, within the 3/8 time signature, evokes a waltz style. This initial statement replicates the Fantasia with a statement of Row 1 in the P-6 version, example 39. The next statement of Row 1 can be found in measures 6-8 in the bass clef this time in P-9 version, as seen in example 40.

**Example 39: Amlin, “Scherzo” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 1-8**

Row 1: P-6

1

mf

f

mf

7

**Example 40: Amlin, “Scherzo” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 6-8**

6

Row 1: P-9

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Various creative applications of the rows appear in the course of the movement.

In measures 44-47, Row 1 is used simultaneously in P-6 and P-5 (example 41); in

measures 62-65, Row 1: P-2 and P-1 are dovetailed in each hand; and in measures 66-69

Row 1: P-3 and P-4 are dovetailed simultaneously in each hand (example 42).

**Example 41: Amlin, “Scherzo” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 44-47**

44

Row 1: P-6

*p*

Row 1: P-5

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**Example 42: Amlin, “Scherzo” from Sonata No. 7, mm. 62-69**

The musical score for Example 42, measures 62-69, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 62-66) shows the piano staff with Row 1: P-2, Row 1: P-3, and Row 1: P-4, and the bass staff with Row 1: P-1 and Row 1: P-4. The second system (measures 67-69) shows the piano staff with Row 1: P-3 Cont. and Row 1: P-4 Cont., and the bass staff with Row 1: P-4 Cont. The score includes dynamics such as *p*, *f*, and *pp*, as well as markings for *cresc.* and *subito*. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

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As the work progresses, Row 1 appears several times in retrograde inversion, but the real excitement develops as the fugue approaches. Here Amlin finally uses Rows 1, 2 and 3, in various Prime Inversions.

The statement of the fugue subject appears at measure 154, comprised of a clear statement of each row in its prime form (example 43) and thus generating a long and complex subject of 36 notes.

**Example 43: Amlin, “Fugue” from *Sonata No. 7*, mm. 154-160**

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system, starting at measure 154, features two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with a bracket labeled "Row 1: P-1" above the first measure and "Row 2: P-1" above the second measure. The lower staff contains a bass line with a bracket labeled "Row 1: P-1" above the first measure. The second system, starting at measure 158, also features two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with a bracket labeled "Row 2 Cont." above the first measure and "Row 3: P-1" above the second measure. The lower staff contains a bass line with a bracket labeled "Row 3: P-1" above the first measure. The score is written in 6/8 time and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and accidentals.

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After the initial statements of each row, Amlin continues to unfold the fugue with the same series of Rows 1, 2, and 3 except in various inversions until the reemergence of the scherzo. The serial techniques used in the “Fantasia” and “Scherzo and Fugue” help to fuse the sonata as a whole.

Name Calling

Another form of row technique that Amlin uses is to create a subject by assigning pitches to the alphabetic letters of a personal name, a technique I will designate “name calling.” This technique appears in one of the *Five Preludes*, “A Birthday Greeting,” and in the *Three Alphabetudes*, a collection of three separate works, each dedicated to a particular individual. Amlin uses a simple system of assigning one letter of the alphabet

to each ascending chromatic half-step, beginning with the pitch middle C representing the letter A. From this assignment of pitches Amlin then chooses the notes that construct a “row” based on the name of the dedicatee. Thus, for example, “A Birthday Greeting” was composed for Frank Glazer’s 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday, and therefore uses Glazer’s name as the basis for its “row” (example 44). Mr. Glazer is an eminent pianist and emeritus member of the Eastman faculty, a former teacher of Amlin’s and especially cherished for his sensitive chamber music performances. Discovering the various uses of the name make for a better understanding of the construction of the work.

**Example 44: Amlin, “A Birthday Greeting” from *Five Preludes for Piano***

*for Frank Glazer's 80th Birthday*

## A Birthday Greeting



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The three “rows” of this kind, used in *Three Alphabetudes*, are shown in example 45. The first is based on the name Stefan Kozinski, a friend of Amlin’s. Kozinski is a pianist and conductor and, according to Nadia Boulanger “one of the most gifted

musicians I have ever met.”<sup>3</sup> This piece is the longest and most challenging of the three, with enough rhythmic complexities and technical difficulties to challenge any pianist. As in this case, Amlin often heightens the challenges of his works by indicating very fast tempos. The second Alphabetude is entitled “Piece for N.A.N.” or Nanette A. Nowels. Into its 24 measures Amlin packs an abundance of technical challenges, rhythmic complexities, and extreme shifts of tempo, pitch, and dynamics.

**Example 45: Amlin, Three Tone Rows from *Three Alphabetudes***

**Etude: on the name Stefan Kozinski**



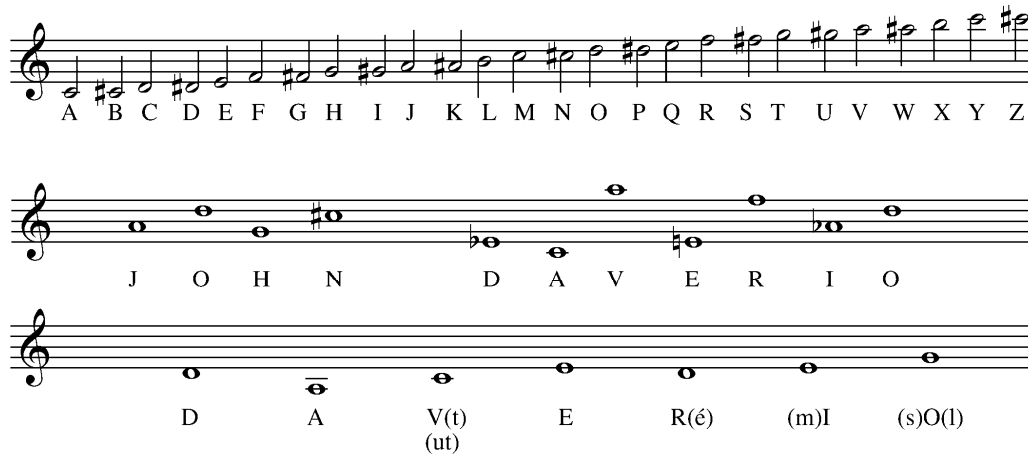
**Piece for N.A.N.**



<sup>3</sup> Rick Hartung, *Stefan Kozinski*, 2009 [on-line] available from <http://home.bway.net/hartung/koz.html>; Internet, accessed 6 March 2009.

**Example 45: Continued**

## **Meditation on J...D...**



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The third and final Alphabetude is entitled “Meditation on J...D...” or “John Daverio.” John Daverio was a close friend of Amlin’s who passed away from an unfortunate accident. Daverio, musicologist, was one of the world’s leading experts on German Romanticism, and Robert Schumann in particular, and was Chairman of the Department of Musicology at Boston University.<sup>4</sup>

Besides listing the notes of the row for John Daverio, Amlin also gives an alternative row for Daverio highlighting ut, re, mi, and sol for this row. According to Amlin, “Daverio” worked in conjunction with fixed-do solfège practices with minor adjustments to the syllables. “D,” “A,” and “E” are directly represented with the staff

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Anderson, *John Daverio*, 2009 [on-line] available from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/john-daverio-755441.html>; Internet, accessed 6 March 2009.



note names. The letter “V”, having a close relationship of “U”, is represented with the archaic “ut” for “do” in the fixed-do system. Thus, continuing with the fixed-do system, the “R,” “I,” and “O” become “ré,” “mi,” and “sol.” With this alternative row, Amlin accesses a wider range of possibilities for the conception of the work. It is interesting that the two Daverio’s can be dovetailed together, as shown in mm. 12-13 of the piece (example 46).

**Example 46: Amlin, “Meditation on J...D...” from *Three Alphabetudes*, mm. 12-13**

DAVERI      D AVERI

12      7      7      6

*cresc.*      *mp*

Alternate: D A V(t) E R(e) (m)I (s)O)l  
(ut)

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*General Implication for Performance*

Amlin’s explanation of the construction of his three favorite tone rows found in *Sonata No. 7*, in a personal conversation, opened up an exciting process of discovery. It became possible to appreciate the continuity within Amlin’s composition when the connection between the rows generating the subject of the fugue from the third movement of *Sonata No. 7* and the rows used in the first movement came to light.

Similarly, the varied use of row techniques found within the *Three Alphabetudes*, involving the construction of a row based on the name of a particular individual, helped to form a concrete framework within each individual composition that could be perceived by delineating the multiple applications of the row in each piece. Knowing more about the names of individuals and their relationship to the composer, again by means of personal conversation, personalized the study in a motivating way.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The keyboard music of Martin Amlin demonstrates an impressive versatility and depth of compositional skill while maintaining continuity through the use of major and minor seventh chord sonorities. Because he is an accomplished pianist as well as composer, he understands how to write in a manner that is very fulfilling for the pianist. Each piece that the pianist undertakes will fit well under the hands and be satisfying to execute, although his writing assumes considerable technical mastery on the part of the performer.

Examining the compositional style of Martin Amlin as manifested through his keyboard works generates many insights that can lead to a more insightful performance. Understanding how Amlin unifies works, such as *Sonata No. 7*, through foreshadowing of motives, as in the “Lament” in the “Scherzo and Fugue,” through restatement of motives, as in the opening of the “Fantasia” at the end of the “Scherzo and Fugue,” and through the use of harmonic construction unifying works such as *Eight Variations*, contributes to a deeper understanding of his keyboard style. A wide diversity in styles is employed in Amlin’s music, ranging from the collection of parodic idioms in *Eight Variations* through the use of serial technique in *Sonata No. 7* and the variation of serial technique employed in the *Three Alphabetudes* to the comprehension of complex

rhythmic techniques, all contribute to a deeper understanding of his works that generates a more artistic and fulfilling presentation for the performer and in turn for the listener.

It is hoped that this document's brief introduction to Amlin's style will assist the reader who seeks to develop such a performance, and will spark greater general interest in his keyboard works, inspiring others to explore further what Amlin has to offer to the pianist and the listener. Placing this wealth of techniques at the service of a fertile imagination, Martin Amlin has established a growing reputation in the realm of classical piano literature. We look forward with great eagerness to further works from the pen of this American master.

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APPENDIX A  
PIANO WORKS

### **Piano Sonata No. 4 (1973)**

DURATION: 17 Minutes

#### MOVEMENTS:

1. Sonata
2. Lament
3. Exultation
4. Postlude

### **Piano Sonata No. 5 (1982)**

DURATION: 20 Minutes

#### MOVEMENTS:

1. Rhapsodic Prelude
2. Cadenza
3. Circle of Fifths
4. Intermezzo
5. Toccata

### **Piano Sonata No. 6 (1987)**

(in one movement)

DURATION: 10 Minutes

### **Five Preludes (1995)**

for Piano

DURATION: 15 Minutes

#### MOVEMENTS:

1. Variations
2. Elegy
3. Aria
4. A Birthday Greeting
5. South End Rag

### **Eight Variations for Piano (2000)**

DURATION: 5 Minutes

### **Piano Sonata No. 7 (2000)**

DURATION: 14 Minutes

#### MOVEMENTS:

1. Fantasia
2. Lament
3. Scherzo and Fugue

### **Three Alphabetudes (2005)**

for piano

DURATION: 10 Minutes

### **Seven Etudes on Intervals (2007)**

for piano solo

APPENDIX B

TONE ROWS



**Row 1**

**I**

	C	F	Ab	Db	Bb	Eb	E	A	F#	B	D	G	
	G	C	Eb	Ab	F	Bb	B	E	Db	F#	A	D	
	E	A	C	F	D	G	Ab	Db	Bb	Eb	F#	B	
	B	E	G	C	A	D	Eb	Ab	F	Bb	Db	F#	
	D	G	Bb	Eb	C	F	F#	B	Ab	Db	E	A	
P	A	D	F	Bb	G	C	Db	F#	Eb	Ab	B	E	
	Ab	Db	E	A	F#	B	C	F	D	G	Bb	Eb	
	Eb	Ab	B	E	Db	F#	G	C	A	D	F	Bb	
	F#	B	D	G	E	A	Bb	Eb	C	F	Ab	Db	
	Db	F#	A	D	B	E	F	Bb	G	C	Eb	Ab	
	Bb	Eb	F#	B	Ab	Db	D	G	E	A	C	F	
	F	Bb	Db	F#	Eb	Ab	A	D	B	E	G	C	

**R**

**RI**

**Row 2**

**I**

	C	G	Bb	Eb	F	Ab	D	B	C#	F#	A	E	
	F	C	Eb	Ab	Bb	C#	G	E	F#	B	D	A	
	D	A	C	F	G	Bb	E	C#	Eb	Ab	B	F#	
	A	E	G	C	D	F	B	Ab	Bb	Eb	F#	C#	
	G	D	F	Bb	C	Eb	A	F#	Ab	C#	E	B	
P	E	B	D	G	A	C	F#	Eb	F	Bb	C#	Ab	
	Bb	F	Ab	C#	Eb	F#	C	A	B	E	G	D	
	C#	Ab	B	E	F#	A	Eb	C	D	G	Bb	F	
	B	F#	A	D	E	G	C#	Bb	C	F	Ab	Eb	
	F#	C#	E	A	B	D	Ab	F	G	C	Eb	Bb	
	Eb	Bb	C#	F#	Ab	B	F	D	E	A	C	G	
	Ab	Eb	F#	B	C#	E	Bb	G	A	D	F	C	

**R**

**RI**

**Row 3**

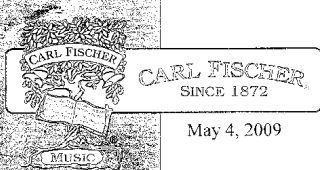
**I**

	C	G	Ab	Eb	Bb	B	F	E	A	D	C#	F#	
	F	C	C#	Ab	Eb	E	Bb	A	D	G	F#	B	
	E	B	C	G	D	Eb	A	Ab	C#	F#	F	Bb	
	A	E	F	C	G	Ab	D	C#	F#	B	Bb	Eb	
	D	A	Bb	F	C	C#	G	F#	B	E	Eb	Ab	
P	C#	Ab	A	E	B	C	F#	F	Bb	Eb	D	G	
	G	D	Eb	Bb	F	F#	C	B	E	A	Ab	C#	
	Ab	Eb	E	B	F#	G	C#	C	F	Bb	A	D	
	Eb	Bb	B	F#	C#	D	Ab	G	C	F	E	A	
	Bb	F	F#	C#	Ab	A	Eb	D	G	C	B	E	
	B	F#	G	D	A	Bb	E	Eb	Ab	C#	C	F	
	F#	C#	D	A	E	F	B	Bb	Eb	Ab	G	C	

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APPENDIX C  
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May 4, 2009

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Musical Works to be included in Publication

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Eight Variations – Habanera; mm. 33-50  
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